Crisis Communications Management-Topics in Health Communication

PRAD 540 – Section 301– HTHC 523-301 – Spring 2014

Wednesdays at 5:45-9:00 pm, DePaul Center, Room 7602

Instructor: Jim Motzer

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Office: 14 E. Jackson, Room 1247

Office hours: Wednesdays from 2 – 5 p.m.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Crisis communications applies the public relations professional’s complete arsenal of skills – creativity, curiosity, diligence, diplomacy, ethical behavior, humility, strategic thinking, quotable language, and a very thick skin – and puts them to the test in a scenario with life-and-death stakes.

All organizations – corporate, government, trade association, non-profit – experience crises. Crises interrupt organizations’ routines and attract extreme public and media scrutiny. For some organizations, a crisis may have long-term and even fatal implications – irrevocably harming the organization’s bottom line, or often worse, its perceived image and reputation. For other organizations, a crisis can be an expected event for which the organization has planned and prepared well in advance. The critical difference between a fatal or fleeting outcome is effective crisis management. And the key to effective crisis management is quick, open and honest communication of actions that restore credibility, confidence and control.

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

This graduate-level course covers crisis communications and issues management with an emphasis on real-world application and case study analysis. Classes will be divided between lecture, class discussion and student presentations. At the end of the course, you will:

• Acquire an overall understanding of the nature of organizational crises, crisis management theory, and effective crisis management principles.

• Understand different types of crises and apply effective crisis communication principles to develop strategic crisis responses for external and internal stakeholders designed to minimize the negative impact of a crisis.

• Become fluent in developing effective messaging and communications techniques required of a skilled spokesperson.

• Gain experience in developing a basic crisis management plan (CMP).

• Recognize potential ethical and legal issues for crisis communications managers.

TEXTBOOKS AND READINGS
Textbook chapters and readings posted on D2L are assigned to complement, not replicate the content covered in class lectures and discussion. Students are expected to stay current with the assigned readings which will be part of class discussions. The textbooks are:

In addition, public relations professionals need to be aware of current events and cultural topics. You can’t manage news if you’re not aware of the news. You should also begin browsing public relations trade publications and academic journals such as *The Public Relations Strategist*, *Public Relations Tactics*, *PR Week*, *PR Daily*, Bulldog Reporter’s *Daily Dog* (which has a great list of PR blogs), and key public relations websites (PRSA, IABC, Institute for PR).

ASSIGNMENTS and GRADING ALLOCATION

Please see the assessment criteria (distributed in class and posted on D2L) for information on how to submit the assignment. If you are scheduled to present your assignment to the class, please bring your document on a “jump” drive. Please use Microsoft Word (11 or 12-point font, 1.5 line spacing) and PowerPoint for assignments.

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date indicated in the Course Calendar. Late assignments will be subject to grade penalties of 10% for each day after the due date for a maximum of three days. Work submitted more than three days after the due date will not be accepted. Students are responsible for all assignments given during an absence. Make-up work is not available without prior instructor permission.

1. **Class Attendance and Participation – 20%**

   **Your success in this course will depend on attending class.** Because missing one class is the equivalent of missing 10% of the quarter, students are expected to attend every class unless excused in advance by the instructor. Excused absences may include severe illness, funeral of an immediate family member, or other event with a non-negotiable date such as an emergency surgery or student athlete competition. Only in extremely rare circumstances will students receive more than one excused absence during the quarter. Students who leave while the class is in session will be marked absent except in extreme emergency as defined by the instructor.

   **Active class participation** is important to prepare you for the professional world which expects all employees to voice their thinking. Each class will have significant opportunities for discussion including the assigned readings and current news topics with PR implications. Every week each student is expected to make at least one significant contribution to the discussion or ask the guest speaker a thoughtful question.

   Keeping up with the assigned **readings** is essential for participating in the class discussion. Each week, students are asked to submit by 2 pm the day of class via the dropbox one question about the reading which will be part of the evening’s class discussion.

   The weekly attendance and participation grade is worth three points with one point for each:
   - Attending class
   - Submitting by 2pm in the dropbox a question about the reading (as outlined in the course calendar)
   - Making a significant contribution to class discussion

   For class sessions that do not require a question to be submitted, attending class and making a significant contribution with be worth 1.5 points each to total three points.

2. **Dezenhall Book Perspective – 10%**

   As presented in our Fearn-Banks textbook, classic crisis communications management continues to hold Tylenol’s management of its 1982 cyanide crisis as the industry’s gold
standard. Even today public relations professionals recommend key learnings from that crisis. In *Damage Control*, Eric Dezenhall, a crisis manager with a political background, challenges this traditional approach.

No matter whether you subscribe to the Fearn-Banks or Dezenhall approach, effective crisis managers are encouraged to pursue vigilant thinking which recommends considering a variety of viewpoints and evaluating their positives and negatives. To facilitate class discussion on Dezenhall’s book, you will develop a 3-4-page perspective on the book and submit it in the D2L dropbox before class on April 16.

4. **Guest Professor Midterm Crisis Case Team Presentations – 15%**
   To replicate the typical crisis environment in which public relations professionals collaborate with others within an organization, I will randomly organize students into teams and each student group will select a crisis case study to present, evaluate, and facilitate discussion with the class. **Presentations cannot cover case studies presented in class.**

5. **Spokesperson Briefing Document – 10%**
   To prepare a crisis spokesperson (or any spokesperson) for a major media interview, professionals develop a briefing document which includes key messages which ensure the most important information is communicated no matter what the interview questions are. The exercise will be assigned in class on May 7 and is due in the D2L dropbox before class on May 14.

6. **Crisis Management Plan (approximately 10-12 pages)**
   **First draft – 13% (10% group and 3% individual)**
   **Final draft – 12% (10% group and 2% individual)**
   Working in the same teams as you did for your crisis case study presentations, you will develop a crisis management plan (CMP) designed to manage a specific scenario. Teams and scenarios will be assigned on May 7. Your CMP will follow a modified version of the format outlined by Fearn-Banks, which we will discuss in class. Ninety minutes of the May 14 class period will be set aside for your team to work on your plan. You will use this plan for the final exam crisis simulation and you will work in the same teams.

7. **Additional Research Analysis – 5%**
   This exercise is designed to develop your sense of curiosity which is an important skill for a PR professional. You will identify a topic mentioned in our textbook or a recent crisis case which we have not discussed in class and conduct additional research from at least five sources to get a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective. This will be due in the D2L dropbox before class on June 4.

8. **Final exam: Crisis Simulation Presentation – June 11, 5:45-9 p.m. – 15% (12% team and 3% individual)**
   In lieu of a final exam, you will work in your crisis plan teams to manage to a hypothetical crisis scenario related to the CMP your team developed. Your team will receive specifics of your crisis on June 4 and will spend at least 90 minutes of that class session developing a response your team will present during a 10-minute press conference on June 11. Between the classes of June 4 and 11, teams may continue to fine-tune their presentations.

**Grading Scale**

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| 4 | 4/23 | **Guest Lecturer**  
Mac McNeer, Weber Shandwick  
**Discussion**  
• Readings and crisis news  
• Tylenol and Exxon Valdez: Bookends on ethical continuum?  
• Legal and ethical concerns  
• Rumors – Tommy Hilfiger  
• Diverse audiences  
**Group exercise**  
• Writing key messages/statements | **Fearn-Banks**  
• Chapter 4 (pp. 44-47)  
• Chapters 6 and 7  
**D2L**  
• Kaufmann (1994). The myth of full disclosure.  
• PRSA Code of ethics  
• WOMMA Ethics Code | **Reading question (2 pm dropbox)** |
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Lecture/Discussion</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Submit</th>
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| 5    | 4/30 | Guest Professor Midterm Crisis Case Team presentations  
• Groups 1-3  
Discussion  
• Readings and crisis news  
Lecture/discussion  
• Labor – manufacturing facility closing | D2L  
• Pryor documents – media statement, media results report, message tracker | • Crisis case study presentations (hardcopy and dropbox) |
| 6    | 5/7  | Guest Professor Midterm Crisis Case Team presentations  
• Groups 4-6  
Crisis Plan Assigned  
• Distribute crisis plan scenarios  
Discussion  
• Readings and crisis news  
Lecture/discussion  
• Conducting a crisis inventory  
• Developing a crisis plan | Fearn-Banks  
• Chapter 15  
• Appendix B | • Crisis case study presentations (hardcopy and dropbox)  
• Spokesperson briefing document assigned |
| 7    | 5/14 | Discussion  
• Readings and current crisis  
Lecture/discussion  
• Product quality/tampering cases  
  o Maple Leaf Foods and listeria  
  o Gerber: standing its ground  
  o Pet Food Institute  
• Organizational misdeeds  
  o Martha Stewart  
  o Penn State  
  o Dow Chemical Olympics  
Class time to work crisis plans | Fearn-Banks  
• Chapter 12 (pp. 243-252)  
D2L  
• Villains and victims of product tampering (Gerber).  
• Pet Food Institute – Restoring public trust | • Reading question (2 pm dropbox)  
• Spokesperson briefing document due (dropbox) |
| 8    | 5/21 | Guest Lecturer  
• Cynthia Lawson, VP, DePaul PR,  
Discussion  
• Readings and crisis news  
Lecture/discussion  
• Death and injury crises  
  o Texas A&M bonfire tragedy  
  o Va. Tech and NIU shootings  
  o Northern Illinois shooting  
• Natural disaster/cultural crises  
  o Hurricane Katrina | Fearn-Banks  
• Chapter 8 (pp. 145-160)  
D2L  
• Northern Illinois University Office of Public Affairs: Putting Lessons Learned to Work | • Question for Cynthia Lawson (2 pm dropbox)  
• First draft crisis plan due Fri, May 23, at 9 a.m. (dropbox) |
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Discussion</th>
<th>Fearn-Banks</th>
<th>Reading Related</th>
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<tr>
<td>5/28</td>
<td>Reading and crisis news</td>
<td>Chapter 11 (pp. 215-226)</td>
<td>Reading question (2 pm dropbox)</td>
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<td>Lecture/discussion</td>
<td>D2L</td>
<td>Final draft crisis plan due, Mon, June 2, at 9 a.m. (dropbox)</td>
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<td>Healthcare crises</td>
<td>Page Society case - Gardasil</td>
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<td>American Airlines Tweets with Passengers Aboard Flight 24</td>
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<td>Transportation crises</td>
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Any scheduling changes will be announced in class and reinforced on D2L.

**CLASS POLICIES**

Students will be treated as you can expect to be treated in the work place. As an adult professional you will be expected to be on the job on-time every day and responsible for your own performance. Students are expected to turn off all cell phones in the classroom and remain in the classroom during each session.

**Technology-Assisted Learning Policy**

You are welcome to use computers to take notes in class. If you are seen using your computer in class for another purpose, you will have to take notes by hand for the rest of the course.

**Desire to Learn (D2L)**

I will use the class D2L site as the primary method of communication with you. On D2L, I will post detailed assessment criteria for all assignments, additional readings, and the Powerpoint slides for all lectures by noon on Wednesdays. Please check the site often.

**Guest speakers**

During the quarter, several guest speakers who are leaders in their fields will share their insights. Please grant them the respect and attention they deserve, which will also reflect well on DePaul. Take full advantage of the opportunity: familiarize yourself with their work before class; take notes during their presentations; ask thoughtful questions; introduce yourself after class and invite them to be part of your professional network.

**Writing**

Strong writing and grammar skills including accurate spelling and correct punctuation are essential to succeed in the public relations field. Errors undermine the thoughtfulness and credibility of your documents and will have a negative impact on your assignment grade.

**Academic Integrity**

Any instance of academic dishonesty such as plagiarism is a severe breach of trust and will be penalized on a case-by-case basis. Work done for this course must adhere to the University Academic Integrity Policy at: [http://academicintegrity.dePaul.edu](http://academicintegrity.dePaul.edu).
Special Learning Needs
Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss their specific needs in confidence. To ensure you receive the most reasonable accommodation based on your needs, please contact me as soon as possible during the quarter (preferably within the first week or two) and for additional support services please contact the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD), #370, Student Center, LPC, 773.325.1677

Dean of Students Office
The Dean of Students Office (DOS) helps students in navigating the university, particularly during difficult situations, such as personal, financial, medical, and/or family crises. Absence Notifications to faculty, Late Withdrawals, and Community Resource Referrals, support students both in and outside of the classroom. Additionally we have resources and programs to support health and wellness, violence prevention, substance abuse and drug prevention, and LGBTQ student services. We are committed to your success as a DePaul student. Please feel free to contact the office at http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/dos/.

Continuing in this class indicates acceptance of the policies and procedures outlined in this syllabus and explained during the first class session regardless of a student's attendance at the first class session.